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RURAL SOCIOLOGY AS A COLLEGE DISCIPLINE

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In order to define the field of rural sociology it is necessary to outline the rural problem in such a way as to indicate the main lines of thought and types of subject matter that must be presented by an educational institution which designs to serve the needs of agriculture in whole or in part.

The Rural Problem

We may for this purpose, therefore, make an analysis of the rural problem under five heads:

1. The first is *the technical aspect*, the question being, "How can the individual farmer most effectively and economically utilize the laws of nature in the growing of plants and animals for human food?" From the standpoint of the farmer, this may be called "farm practice"; from the standpoint of the teacher, it embraces all of those technical subjects in the fields of agriculture, such as dairying, agronomy, pomology, etc., that help answer the question.

2. *The business aspect*, which involves the question, "How can the individual farmer so organize the factors of production—land, labor, and capital—on his farm, so adapt farm practice to his particular branches of production, and so dispose of his products, as to yield to him the largest net return, while still maintaining the integrity of his land and equipment?" This represents the individual farmer at work on his particular farm, trying to make a living from it, under the necessity of following the best farm practice, and equally under the necessity of selling to advantage and of managing the business in an economical way. The term, "farm administration," may well be given to this field of study.

3. We come now to what may be called *the scientific aspect* of the farm question, in which this query is raised, "How can we learn more of those laws of nature which concern the growth of plants and animals for human uses, how apply those laws to the procuring of an increased food supply, and how, at the same time,

conserve the natural resources upon which the food supply depends?" If there is such a thing as "agricultural science," it develops in the attempt to answer this question. This field is, at present, covered by the various physical and biological sciences, such as chemistry, botany, zoology, etc., and their offshoots—like entomology—when developed on the economic side.

4. *The industrial aspect* of the farm question calls for an answer to this question, "How can farmers as a class secure the largest financial success while giving to consumers an adequate food supply and conserving soil resources?" This is the subject matter of "agricultural economics," and has to do with all those larger industrial questions which involve groups of farmers, farmers as a class, and the relationships of the farmers to other workers and to the nation as a whole.

5. *The community aspect.* Here we approach those questions that have more to do with the ultimate ends of life, with the welfare of the people as the great consideration, and in which this question is asked, "How can the people who farm, best utilize their industrial and social environment in the development of personal character, best co-operate for the common welfare, and so best organize permanent institutions which are to minister to the continued improvement of the common, or community, life?" This is the field of "rural sociology." It is simply an application of the principles of social science to the general welfare of the people who live under rural conditions.

Rural sociology is, therefore, concerned with the way in which farm people live together in their neighborhoods and as a class. It has to do with the reactions of human character under rural environment. It includes a description of the associated efforts that minister to the common desires, needs, and purposes of farm folk. It covers the problem of "better living," of "country life" as a whole. It emphasizes the large needs and methods of the common life of rural people. It involves the question of the permanence of a satisfactory rural civilization and of the social agencies, or institutions, necessary to such a civilization.

The Field of Rural Sociology

In order to make the boundaries of rural sociology still more definite, it may be well just here to make a brief analysis of the

subject so far as it relates to the general types, or classes, of material that are to be studied.

1. *The rural people themselves.* What is their status? What have been the movements of rural population—for what causes and with what results? Why have the cities grown at the expense of the country? We must understand also the social conditions of rural people, whether and how they differ from the urban residents as to race, families, health, crime, illiteracy, morals, temperance, defectives and dependents, insanity, etc. Does the rural environment produce a special series of characteristics? If so, what is the rural mind? In what way does the rural environment influence habits, customs, recreation, family life, individual traits, individualism itself, public opinion, superstition, leadership? What are the influences of nature, of the isolated mode of living, of class segregation, of special types of farming, of tenant farming, etc.?

2. We must also study the social institutions of rural life, how they are organized, how they differ from similar institutions in the cities, their special needs, their adaptability to rural conditions. We need to study family life itself; the schools and means of education, including the rural school; agricultural schools and colleges, and extension teaching; libraries; the church and its allies, such as the Sunday school, the young people's societies, the Y. M. C. A., the Y. W. C. A. We must study the associated efforts among the farmers, including clubs and societies, and the general organizations like the Grange and the Farmers' Union. We need to know the workings of government in their application to rural life and needs, including the national and state governments, but more particularly the local government in the rural communities; and we also need to study as a special field the general application of both common and statute law to rural affairs.

3. We cannot very well consider the rural problem in its social aspects without becoming convinced that the teacher of rural sociology should also be to some degree a propagandist. The rural problem itself is so significant and vital, the need for co-operative planning is so apparent, that it becomes necessary to develop a program for rural betterment, to indicate the means by which we may secure a larger development of the rural community. Therefore this work constitutes a distinct phase of rural sociology.

General Statement of the Farm Problem

Before going farther it may be well to make a general statement of the farm problem in order to indicate the significance of rural sociology as a subject of study, and also to show how the point of view of the student and teacher of rural sociology should include every phase of the problem and should relate the social to all the rest: "The American rural problem is to maintain upon the land a class of people who represent the best American ideals—in their industrial success, in their political influence, in their intelligence and moral character, and in their general social and class power."

The Place of Rural Sociology as a Subject of Study

Having analyzed the field, we may now indicate a little more intimately the special reasons why rural sociology should become an organic part of the course of study in an agricultural college. These remarks cannot be applied fully to the study of rural sociology as a part of the general courses in sociology in a college or university, and they are given here chiefly for the sake of making clear, if possible, the place which rural sociology ought to occupy in the scheme of agricultural education. We must discuss the principles underlying a college vocational course in agriculture.

1. A vocational course should lay the foundation for technical, or professional, skill and efficiency.

2. A vocational course should indicate to the pupil how social relationships bear upon one's work, how social and economic forces aid or hinder him as an individual.

3. A vocational course should show, conversely, how a person, by proper pursuit of his vocation, may and ought to make it a means of service to his fellowmen, and should thus indicate that the social motive must be present in an adequate pursuit of one's lifework.

4. A vocational course should show the pupil how to use his vocation as a means of personal growth or culture, intellectual and moral.

From the standpoint of an agricultural vocational course of college grade, in which the college directs its efforts toward training for all the main agricultural vocations, such as those of farmers, professional agriculturists, teachers, investigators, rural social

engineers, and so on, the social relationships of agriculture must be taught. Only in this way can the social character of the agriculturist's work be fully appreciated. Furthermore, the real rural problem must be understood and the need of rural community welfare and progress be appreciated, and the applications of rural leadership enforced, or else the social motive is likely to be absent. And, finally, the wonderful power of the rural vocation to contribute to one's personal growth and culture needs to be emphasized. Undoubtedly this power may be imparted through the technical subjects of study. Nevertheless, technical agriculture and farm administration, and even agricultural sciences, have more or less of the individual point of view. It is only when a man studies the industrial and social relationships of agriculture that he begins to appreciate his environment as a worker, a citizen, and a man—and may we not define culture as appreciation of environment?

Of course, when rural sociology is pursued not as part of a vocational course, but simply as a phase of social science, in a college or university, the excuse for giving it lies rather in the significance of the rural question as a part of the general social problem. While the ratio of rural population to total population is constantly decreasing and will continue to decrease indefinitely, nevertheless the total rural population will increase slowly. To-day nearly fifty millions of the rural people in the United States are living under the rural environment. Consequently, the welfare of these people and of the communities in which they live must be a vital concern to the student of the social question.

Courses in Rural Sociology

It may be asked what courses should be offered. In the college or university course, or in the agricultural college where it is not planned to develop rural sociology as a special department, two courses may be given. The first, a descriptive course, which might have the title, "The Rural Community." It need not necessarily be preceded by a general course in sociology, although undoubtedly that would be an advantage, but it should purpose to bring the student into touch with actual conditions and to interpret those conditions, both individual and institutional, in the light of the larger needs of country life.

The second course, whatever its title, should discuss the social

aspect of the rural problem. It should attempt an analysis of the entire problem and indicate not only the unity, or integrity, of the rural question, but also the supreme significance of the social welfare phases of it, and the fundamental importance of the rural question as a phase of national life.

In an agricultural college which means to make a good deal of the social aspect of the teaching of agriculture, the work in rural sociology will necessarily be somewhat highly specialized. Each instructor will, of course, work out his own problems, but there is suggested here an illustrative list of courses:

I. *Rural Sociology.*

1. The Rural Community—a general descriptive course
2. The Development of the Rural Community
3. The Rural Problem
4. The Rural Family
5. The School and the Rural Community
6. The Church and the Rural Problem
7. Farmers' Associations
8. Rural Government
9. Rural Law
10. The Social Psychology of Rural Life
11. The Social Status of the Rural People
12. Social Aspects of Current Agricultural Questions

II. *Agricultural Education.* (As a specialized phase of Rural Sociology.)

1. Elementary Agriculture
2. Secondary Agriculture
3. History of Agricultural Education
4. Organization of Courses in Agriculture
5. Administration of Agricultural Institutions
6. Extension Teaching in Agriculture
7. Agricultural Research.

There are two further phases of this subject of rural sociology as a college discipline that must not be left out of the question. The first is the need of investigations; the second, the need of a propaganda.

Investigations should be an organic part of the class work in

rural sociology. Community surveys are being undertaken under many auspices, and there are standard blanks for the purpose which can be easily utilized in class work. But a department of rural sociology should also participate, through its teaching force, in a comprehensive and thoroughly scientific study of all the social phases of rural life. We may have thoroughgoing agricultural surveys made under government auspices, or by privately endowed agencies, or by various voluntary associations. Either in co-operation with these or alone, the department of rural sociology should not fail to make investigational work a matter of large concern.

The same is true, at least in the agricultural college, in the organized movement for the betterment of agriculture and country life that may be represented by the phrase, "a campaign for rural progress," or in more sober terms, "the development of the rural community." The college has a responsible leadership in stimulating a constructive development of the rural community. It should emphasize the community-idea, enlarge upon the need of community ideals, assist in the arrangement of a constructive program of community building, help in an institutional division of labor by which the function of the various rural institutions is determined and the program for each one of them developed. Conferences on rural progress, plans for local community betterment, participation in a state-wide movement for the federation of rural social forces, are all parts of the legitimate work of a department of rural sociology in an agricultural college.